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National League for the Protection of the Family.
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THE NATIONAL

DIVORCE REFORM LEAGUE.

AN ABSTRACT

OF ITS

ANNUAL REPORTS,

October, 1885.

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THE

National Divorce Reform League.

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The National Divorce Reform League.

The Executive Committee, having been unable to print the annual reports of the Divorce Reform League from year to year, have caused the following abstract to be made from them and such other sources as the League has at its command.

It is intended to give, in as brief form as possible, a sketch of the organization, needs and aims of the League, together with a short notice of the results already secured by it. We commend it to the careful consideration of those into whose hands it may come.

October, 1885.

Organization.— This association was formed January 24th, 1881, under the name of the New England Divorce Reform League. Ex-President Woolsey of Yale College was its president for two years, until compelled by age to resign. The name of National Divorce Reform League and a revised constitution were adopted February 16th, 1885, in order to meet the growth of our work west of New England. It is our intention to elect officers from still other states as fast as practicable for successful work. The members now number about sixty, and these have power to add to their list. Its Corresponding Secretary is the Rev. Samuel W. Dike, who is widely known for his researches and writings upon the Family, and whose work as Secretary is under the immediate direction of the Executive Committee.

Object. — The object of the League, as set forth in its constitution, is "to promote an improvement in public sentiment and legislation on the institution of the Family, especially as affected by existing evils relating to Marriage and Divorce. It may co-operate with auxiliary or other bodies having similar aims in such ways as may be deemed expedient." Its membership includes distinguished representatives of all leading Christian bodies, (including Catholic), and it is conducted upon the principles of catholicity and by methods of practical common sense. It investigates, publishes information, answers

inquiries, makes addresses, gives lectures, directs public opinion, and encourages good legislation. Indeed, it has become a widely recognized necessity to the clergy and the press, to legislators and students of social problems, as its important and increasing correspondence, reaching all over the country, shows. The demand for its work, and the growing feeling of the need of such a literature as it can provide, far exceed its present ability to supply.

The Need of the League. — Some facts will best show this. Connecticut granted 91 divorces in 1849, or, it is estimated, 1 to each 35 marriages of the year. In 1878 the annual average for fourteen years, as given officially, had become 445, or one to 10.4 marriages. Vermont divorces increased from 94 in 1860, to 197 in 1878; those of Massachusetts in the same period, from 243 in 1860 to 655 in 1883, and the ratio from 1 to 51.4 to 1 to 27.8; of New Hampshire from 107 in 1860 to 315 in 1884, or 1 to 10.5 marriages; those of Rhode Island from 162 in 1869 to 273 in 1880, or 1 to 10.2; while Maine for the four years ending with 1882, averaged 534 annually, with a ratio of probably 1 to 11, or possibly 1 to 10. New England entire reached, in 1880, the maximum of 2240 divorces, notwithstanding the considerable reduction in number which legislation had secured in four of these six states. In Ohio the increase was from 837 in 1865, or 1 to 26 marriages, to 1965 in 1883, or 1 to 16; in New Jersey, in four years, from 144 to 183; in New York city, from 212 in 1870 to 316 in 1882; in Philadelphia, from 153 in 1875 to 242 in 1884. Partial reports show that in one-third of the counties in Michigan, in Louisville, Chicago, and parts of Kansas, the ratio has been as high as 1 to 13. We have the official returns for 1884, from more than three-fourths the counties of Indiana, and the ratio was 1 to 10.4. In half of California the ratio to marriage *licenses* was 1 to 7.4. In Arapahoe county, Colorado, (Denver), there were 197 granted in 1883, or 1 to 3.9. And other counties can be found, east and west, where the ratio has been nearly as large. In some it has been even greater. A study of the published lists of names of parties to divorce suits in some large cities at the west shows that some European immigrants quickly learn to avail themselves of the facilities of our divorce laws. And well authenticated reports have been made to us

of the practice, to a considerable extent, among the lowest classes in some of our large manufacturing towns, of voluntary separation and re-marriage to other parties in utter defiance of all law. The last report of "the minister-at-large" in the city of Lowell, Mass., states that out of the 446 families aided by that society the last year, 56 were those of deserted wives. "In the year previous 66 desertions are reported in 420 cases. This is about the usual average from year to year," says the report. Many of these men marry again without divorce, and many live with other women without marriage. In some country districts, the utmost vigilance on the part of the agents of the Pension office is required to prevent fraud under the law which forbids pensions in case of re-marriage. And the lack of a vigorous public sentiment often leads to illicit unions in back country towns.

Such statistical material as we have been able to gather goes to show also a serious increase of crimes against chastity in many sections of the country, of illegitmate births and connected evils, and a decline in the marriage and birth-rate in some of the states. There is reason to think that these evils have contributed much more to the causes of crime, insanity and poverty than is suspected by most people. The official authority on the subject puts the crimes due to licentiousness in England as equal to those caused by intemperance. And some other European authorities give remarkable figures concerning the prevalence of crime and suicide among divorced persons. Without attempting exact estimates, we do not hesitate to say that defective conditions in American homes join with divorce and licentiousness in vastly swelling the volume of crime and intemperance. Statistical inquiry must be pushed in this direction.

Mormon polygamy really presents the problem of the Family. Some of the best authorities have come to the conclusion that the principle of separate families demanding separate holdings of land, and laws of inheritance based on the simple Family, is the key to Indian civilization, and that a better Family is the greatest single need of the freedmen of the south. And that the purification of the city, the preservation of vigorous, pure life in the country town, the security of capital, the best protection of labor, and the most effective work of religion and

education depend on the Family to an immeasurable degree, is coming to be felt as it never has been in the lifetime of the present generation.

To meet these needs we have been strangely unprepared. The loosest of marriage and divorce laws disgrace the statutes of many of our states. Their variety is almost endless. Their conflict is serious. And the ways by which they have often come into being, and been continued and administered are a disgrace to the good name of the American people. But worst of all is the public sentiment that has tolerated them and encouraged their abuse to the alarming degree now prevalent, and which has made almost all efforts at their reform slow and laborious, and often made inoperative all laws designed to protect the moralities and other interests of the Family. We have encouraged the desertion and abuse of wives by these laws and by our neglect to punish crimes against the Home, and have made the Family rest on a mere partnership, often practically dissoluble at the will of one or both parties.

Such was the need for special work. Nothing existed to meet it. There were no good publications for the people, to speak of, and few of any kind. A bureau of information for the clergyman, the editor and legislator, was a necessity. A common channel of communication and a common source of supply which could be used by all who desired was an imperative condition of economical and efficient work in reform.

The Work Already Done. — It is only three years since the League was able to ask the Corresponding Secretary to enter the field upon a salary. *The entire income of the League in that time has been less than five thousand dollars.* Consequently, the Secretary has been asked to give but a part of his time to our work for the past twelve months. We cannot present in tangible form the most important part of the results of our efforts which are already apparent in the wide interest that has been awakened in the subject, and in the improved state of public opinion. But some of the more public work done may be stated, and the evidence of its earlier fruits in legislation can be given.

Two or three improvements in legislation were made before our organization, but in nearly every instance they were

secured by the friends of the League in their own states. The chief legislation since the movement for reform began may be briefly noted. Connecticut repealed its notorious "omnibus" clause, with a marked falling off in the number of divorces. Massachusetts has made all divorces *nisi*, or conditional for six months, forbade the re-marriage of the guilty party for two years, and provided for the systematic collection and report of Divorce statistics. Maine practically abolished its old law, by which most divorces were granted under a single exceedingly loose clause giving general discretion to the courts, and has substituted for it the several determinate clauses of Massachusetts, adding regulations concerning the re-marriage of both parties. Divorces under the new law, enacted March 13, 1883, have been less than half what they were before. New Hampshire adopted the rule recommended by the American Bar Association, regulating domicile, and made the collection of statistics an official duty; and a restrictive measure passed its Senate in July, 1885, but failed in the House. Vermont first put restrictions on the re-marriage of the libellee, and modified the law of residence, causing a decrease in the divorces of the last five years of 14 per cent. from the number for the five years previous. Recently other, and probably still more effective, legislation, has been obtained. By this latter, all applications must now be filed at the term of court preceding their actual hearing, insuring a delay of six months and making fraud more difficult; and the court is required to compel the attendance of the defendant in person unless this is proven to be impracticable. In Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Ohio, the governors have repeatedly called attention to the need of reform, and something will probably be done at an early day. The latter state has organized a state Divorce Reform League. Pennsylvania has greatly improved her marriage laws, a work which, it is hoped, other states will take up. Philadelphia and Chicago have better rules of procedure in their courts. Divorces in Chicago are considerably less, in proportion, than formerly. New Jersey and Indiana now collect statistics.

The Department of State, at the request of our Corresponding Secretary, undertook to collect information concerning the social and domestic conditions of the emigrants from Europe to this country. This inquiry will take considerable time longer,

but will probably lay before the government and the people information of the greatest importance.

The officers of the League, and others, asked for and obtained a bill in Congress, providing for the "collection of statistics of, and relating to, marriage and divorce throughout the several states and territories, and in the District of Columbia," for the purpose of getting material for an intelligent opinion on the great question of our conflicting divorce laws, and for its great value in other ways. This passed the Senate unanimously, and was favorably reported in the House of Representatives, but failed to reach a vote before the end of the last Congress. The measure had the support of men of all political parties, and of various opinions on the subject of Divorce legislation as the most desirable plan for getting those facts which are indispensable to any safe legislation or a sound judgment of the subject. It will probably be pressed upon the attention of Congress again at an early day.

General Work. — The League has issued a few circulars from time to time, but as yet has printed no other documents for want of means. Besides the general work of correspondence, consultation and a good deal of writing for the newspapers on the subject, the Corresponding Secretary has made addresses in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Columbus, Washington, and other cities; in some of them a number of times. He has addressed numerous state and national Christian assemblies, clubs, committees and legislatures. He has given one or more lectures at John Hopkins', at Boston University and Columbia College law schools, in the theological seminaries at Andover, Cambridge (Episcopal divinity school), Newton. Hartford, New Haven, New York and Princeton, and was special lecturer at Andover in 1885 on the Family and Social Problems, giving a course of six lectures. Aside from his strict duties as Secretary, Mr. Dike has published an article in the *Princeton Review* on the Divorce question, of which a reprint of a thousand copies has been nearly all distributed in response to inquiry, and two short articles in the *Homiletical Review* giving material and hints for pulpit treatment of the subject. Four or five articles in other reviews have nearly all been in direct treatment of the Family. A leading publishing house has invited him to prepare a book on the Divorce question,

which will in time put much material into the hands of its readers

Great interest has been awakened in the subject, and many able articles have appeared from various writers in the reviews, magazines, daily newspapers and the weekly press. And there is much study and thought given to the subject. Above all, writers are discussing it more wisely and broadly.

The Present Need. — In a single word, it is money with which to push our work, which is yet only well begun. The best efficiency cannot be secured without the expenditure of several thousand dollars annually. Although contributions steadily increased until this year, the League has never had enough in any one year to pay the salary of the Secretary and his expenses. The consequence has been that good opportunities have been lost, our Secretary has not been paid his low salary, and for the year past has been on half-pay, at his own request, in order to reduce the debt of the League, but all the time, as was seen above, doing work almost directly connected with our own in the great field of his special studies. We desire to provide salary, conveniences of office, clerical and other assistance, and publications so that his work and ours may tell to the best advantage. We are evidently at the beginning of the solution of a great problem whose breadth and urgency are just dawning upon a portion of our people only. A singular combination of circumstances makes it a common question for the East and the West, the North and the South. It lies at the root of nearly all that is dearest in property, education, morals, law and religion. Distinguished publicists say that the Family is the most important of all our present national questions. It is coming to the front in England and on the continent of Europe. We trust that the gravity of the case, the need of just such an organization as the League, the catholicity of its aims, the high standing of its officers, members and friends, its remarkable success in the three years of its active work under great difficulties, and the promise it affords of far greater usefulness in the future, will insure its speedy establishment on a sound financial basis. The Christian people of the country certainly cannot fail to recognize its Divine mission, and the call it thus makes for their generous support.

Upon marriage society may be said to be built. *U. S. Supreme Court.*

The Family is beyond all doubt the most important question that has come before the American people since the War. ELISHA MULFORD, *Author of "The Nation."*

In my view the continuance of our institutions depends on the purity, the sacredness, and the well-ordering of families. Have what public schools you will, enlighten the people as you may, and without the family as formative, and as offering in its spirit the only model of a right government, the permanence of free institutons in any such form as to make them a blessing is impossible. Hence I regard your work and that of the Society with which you are connected as of high importance, in view of alarming facts, and of the present attitude of the Divorce question. Ex-President MARK HOPKINS.

Whether we are to be a thoroughly christian nation, or to decay and lose our present political forms, depends on our ability to keep family life pure and simple.
Ex-President THEODORE D. WOOLSEY.

In a small compass I can hardly do more than express my deep conviction of the momentous character of the Divorce question and of the value of your labors in connection with it. . . . No revolution would be so tremendous as one which should subvert the family or seriously impair its constitution. The family is even of more importance than the State; the family may regenerate the State, but the State cannot regenerate the family.
GOLDWIN SMITH.

The *Independent* says: "The time has come when the American people should make common cause in correcting this stupendous and flagrant abuse which has gradually crept into the whole divorce system of the country and threatens to sap the very foundations of the nation's life. The statistics on this subject are simply horrible."

The *Christian Advocate:* "Bad as the Mormons are, they are no worse than many divorced persons. A law to give a man more wives than one would not be worse than some laws which give a man the right to put away one wife for a trivial cause and take another."

The *New York Evening Post:* "Probably the greatest impediment in the way of dealing energetically with polygamy in Utah is the condition of popular sentiment about the marriage contract in all parts of the country. In a community in which divorce is so easy and so frequent, the indignation against polygamy does not, in spite of all that is said in Congress, easily become a consuming fire."

The *Springfield Republican:* "The tendency of those who regard the matter seriously as it deserves, is more and more toward the church position that there should be only the ground for divorce that Jesus approved; and though it may not reach as a reforming force absolutely to that point, it will undoubtedly move to a narrowing basis of the causes for divorce and a uniformity of law throughout the states, whether to be attained by a constitutional amendment, or by the slower process of social and legislative action in each state, it is too soon to say."

The *New York Tribune*, in an editorial headed "Organize against Divorce," commending the League says: "Why should not clergymen and all others intercsted in this question form similar organizations throughout the country? There is plenty of work of a practical kind for them to do. In every state such organizations could do much good."

The *Boston Advertiser*, in its notice of the Princeton Review for March, 1884: "The Rev. Samuel W. Dike's paper on, 'Some Aspects of the Divorce Question,' is the solid and thorough article of the number."

The *Congregationalist:* "Why will not some one or more wealthy person endow Mr. Dike as a sort of general lecturer and writer on the Home and Family? Hardly a professorship in the country would be more useful."

The *Boston Herald:* "Rev. Samuel W. Dike, has been the corresponding secretary from the start, and has already become our highest American authority on questions pertaining to divorce, the family and the proper organization of society. Mr. Dike's papers in the leading reviews on these subjects, and his position as special lecturer at the Andover Seminary on social institutions, indicate both his ability as a writer and the confidence felt by others in his capacity to deal with some of thc most important ethical questions of our own time. The enlargement of the League from a New England to a national organization will be gradually accomplished, and the fact that the outlook is hereafter to be national, not local, will greatly facilitate its work and increase its usefulness.

The *Christian Union:* "We need not tell our readers that this work has our warmest regard. Our columns have borne frequent testimony to the value of it and to its remarkable success.

CONSTITUTION

OF THE

National Divorce Reform League.

ARTICLE I. This Association shall be called the NATIONAL DIVORCE REFORM LEAGUE.

ART. II. Its object shall be to promote an improvement in public sentiment and legislation on the institution of the Family, especially as affected by existing evils relating to Marriage and Divorce. It may co-operate with auxiliary or other bodies having similar aims in such ways as may be deemed expedient.

ART. III. It shall consist of the following persons, having power to fill vacancies and to add to their number: . . . . . .

ART. IV. The officers of this Society shall be a President, not more than five Vice Presidents, a Recording Secretary, a Corresponding Secretary, a Treasurer, and an Executive Committee of not more than twelve persons, of which Committee the Corresponding Secretary shall be a member, and of which not less than three shall constitute a quorum, having the duties indicated in their several offices: to be elected at the annual meeting, and to hold office until their successors are appointed.

ART. V. The LEAGUE shall hold its annual meeting on the first Wednesday in January, unless otherwise directed by the Executive Committee, and at such hour and place as shall be indicated in the call of the Cammittee.

ART. VI. Amendments of this Constitution, of which due notice shall have been given in the call of any annual meeting, may be adopted at such meeting by the vote of two-thirds of the members present.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS concerning the work of the League and its general business should be addressed to the Corresponding Secretary, REV. SAMUEL W. DIKE, ROYALTON, VERMONT.

CONTRIBUTIONS should be sent to the Treasurer, W. G. BENEDICT, ESQ., 132 FEDERAL STREET, BOSTON, but may also be sent to the Corresponding Secretary.